4-7-97 A1

Gay marriage issue divides Springs church congregation

Same-sex couple win fight for acceptance

By **Patricia Merritt**
The Gazette

They met more than five years ago and fell in love. Their courtship was like something out of a storybook: instant attraction, romantic dinners and the feeling they were right for one another.

Ultimately, they decided they wanted a church wedding.

"We wanted the union to be blessed and wanted a sense of commitment that comes with making it public," Betty Lynn Mahaffy said.

Although the couple's minister officiated at their commitment ceremony on Sept. 17, 1994, it took place in Colorado College's Shove Chapel, not at their church.

The reason: The church board refused to allow the ceremony because Mahaffy's partner, Lyn Boudreau, is also a woman. First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, did not sanction the union of gays.

The couple's request, however, touched off more than two years of discussion and study at First Congregational on the topic of homosexuals and their place in the

See **GAYS**/B2

■ **HI-COUNTRY NEWCOMERS:** The Hi-Country Newcomers Club will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Village Inn, 8050 N. Academy Blvd., for its Dessert Night Out social. All women are invited to attend. Call Donna at 522-0838 for information.

■ **PARK ADVISORY BOARD:** The El Paso County Park Advisory Board will meet at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Board of County Commissioners' Hearing Room, third floor, 27 E. Vermijo Ave. The meeting includes a review and recommendation on the final draft of the County Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan; discussion on potential multiagency participation with School District 20 on an environmental resource center; and an update on parks construction projects.

■ **MADD CHAPTER:** The Pikes Peak Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving will hold a community meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Ute Pass Cultural Center in Woodland Park.

■ **ABUSE VICTIMS:** Patricia Wyka, victim/witness coordinator for the Colorado Springs Police Department, will speak about male sexual victimization. "Real Guys Don't Tell" will be at 12:15 p.m. Tuesday at University of Colorado and Colorado Springs University Center Alumni Room.

■ **SCHOOL RECOGNITION:** Cheyenne Mountain

Fort Logan Cemetery in D
Mortuary, 2350 Montebel
dling arrangements.

Mr. Whaley was born J
port, Conn., to Herbert P.
Whaley, who are deceased

He is survived by a son
Springs; a daughter, Caro
Country, Calif.; a brother
four sisters, Sis and Ruth
of Connecticut and Ann o
dren; and five great-gran

Mr. Whaley served in t
1945.

He was a member of th

He had lived in Colora
had lived in Inglewood, C

JESSIE SYLVIA WI

5, 1997, at a local care ce

Services will be held i
Nolan Funeral Home is h

Mrs. Williams was bor
pendence to William and
can, who are deceased.

She was married Mar
Kan., to William E. Willi
rado Springs.

Mrs. Williams also is
Polly Ann Burch of Colo

Gays/Issue being dealt with across U.S.

From B1

church. Last month, the church became the first mainline congregation in Colorado Springs to adopt a statement that in effect affirms the participation of gays in all aspects of church life — including "holy unions."

The new policy came after a vote in which about half the 550-member congregation participated. It passed by a better than 2-to-1 ratio. Yet, the vote left a few scars.

"It's heresy," Will Hinkley said of the "holy union" of gays. Hinkley, a member of First Congregational for 20 years, is a former board member who made the motion to prohibit the union of Mahaffy and Boudreau. He and his wife haven't been back to the church since the vote. Others aren't as upset about the policy as they are about the way it was adopted, and the implication that the statement reflects the views of all church members.

"The issue is inclusiveness and that includes those who disagree," said Ben Weeks, a member of the church board. "If you start saying: 'We won't tolerate this or that point of view,' it's not good. That's what this debate has come down to: allowing a dissenting view."

What led up to the vote started about 2½ years ago. Mahaffy and Boudreau asked the worship council, which governs the liturgy and oversees the sanctuary, if they could have a ceremony at First Congregational. The worship council said yes. But the church board voted no, overriding the decision.

The Rev. Jim White, pastor of First Congregational, performed what the couple called a commitment ceremony at Shove. But he wanted his congregation to confront the issue. The government of the denomination is a democratic one and each congregation sets its own policies.

A committee of eight people was formed to hold discussion groups.

The committee was called Fishbone, named after a term coined in the book, "Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality," by Donald Messer and Sally Geis. In the book, the authors say the issue is like a fishbone caught in the throat.

Members of the committee met with about 100 parishioners over six months, discussing and listening to views about homosexuality. From those discussions, a statement was prepared. It endorsed the statement and the congregation voted on it March 9. The result: 190 for, 70 against.

The statement reads: "First Congregational Church, UCC, welcomes into full participation in church life all persons regardless of race, age, gender, ability or sexual orientation. This participation includes, but is not limited to, membership, leadership, employment, sacraments, celebrations, rites and commitment ceremonies. Marriage for heterosexual couples. Holy union for homosexual couples."

The issue of same-sex unions is being dealt with around the country in light of a court case in Hawaii that forces the state to grant marriage licenses to homosexual couples. President Clinton last year signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as an act between a man and a woman and allows states to ban same-sex marriages. In Colorado, a bill currently in the General Assembly echoes the federal law.

Pastor White sees First Congregational's policy as an invitation for gay members to participate in all forms of church life. "It's mostly an issue of whether gay and lesbian people are really in the church or not? Are they loved by God and made in His image?," White said. The minister answers yes.

As for the issue of gay unions, he feels this way: "It's a just and ethical thing to do. We want to encourage lifelong commitments of fidelity."

Even though the policy was put up for a vote, some dissenters didn't like the way the issue was handled.

"It was a parliamentary mess and we ran out of time," Hinkley said. An amendment he drafted that granted participation to gays, excluding being joined in "holy unions," never made it to the floor for discussion, he said.

Nevertheless, there hasn't been a widespread defection. So far only three people have officially resigned their memberships, White said. And last week, the board of directors met with 50 members who voted against the statement. Discussion included adding wording that the statement is church policy, not church law.

"I think people are still emotional about the issue," said Nancy Forgy, church board president. "But I think some are feeling more encouraged that something could be done to make this statement more palatable to everyone."

"No one wants to see anyone leave," said member Ruth Koenigsamen.

Forgy said members have been asked not to do anything rash.

"We have to make sure everyone knows we respect them, no matter what their view," Forgy said.

"Some of us are Republicans, some are Democrats. But that doesn't mean we can't worship together. The church is a sanctuary and we all need to come and worship together."

Nine-year-old Tirrel Grovenstein, left, and her sister, Marie, 6, enjoy Sunday afternoon in a yurt, a nomad's dwelling from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The yurt is part of the Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration at Penrose Public Library through May 23. The display will also feature musical instruments and c Colorado Springs' sister city. Tl Wednesday for people who work Stansfield will perform tales from

Palmer calls in positive reinfo

New voice-mail program gives parents, students virtual pat on the back

By **Wendy Y. Lawton**/The Gazette

Parents dread these calls.

The telephone rings and a prerecorded message informs you that your son or daughter missed one or more classes at school today. Can you please call the attendance office? Or in a calm, professional tone, the voice informs you that your child is failing one or more subjects. Can you please call a counselor right away?

Palmer High School still makes these calls, sinking hearts across the city. But the school is using its massive computer voice-mail system to do something different, too. They're letting parents know their kids are doing good things in school.

Since January, a computer in the main office at Palmer has made 1,149 positive telephone calls to parents. Anything from helping a teacher clean a classroom to better behavior in science class qualifies for the following prerecorded call from Palmer Principal Jay Engeln:

"Hello. Palmer Hi tion that nition fro well done ciation fo cellence. positive n office at good day.

When M work a fe sage on h thrilled.

Details remain sketchy in South Korean knifing; boy's residency uncertain

By **Rich Laden**/The Gazette

A 17-year-old whom South Korean police say is from Colorado Springs remained jailed in that country today after being arrested on charges he fatally stabbed a man during a fight in a fast-food restaurant last week.

Details about the incident were sketchy.

The Associated Press in South Korea identified Patterson Jr., and said it was told